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WILL ENGLAND RETURN TO PROTECTION ?

132 PICCADILLY, LONDON, *April* 25, 1879.

MY DEAR SIR : I have no difficulty in replying to your letter of the 31st ult.

I do not think there is any chance of a return in this country to the doctrine of Protection. We export everything but agricultural produce ; to protect our manufactures is manifestly impossible ; from another cause, the protection of our land produce is not more possible. Half our population exists on imported food ; to limit this import by customs duties, in order to raise the price of home-grown food, is a proposition that can not be entertained for a moment. Such a scheme offered to Parliament and the country would destroy any Government and any party.

We are passing through a time of commercial depression ; its causes are apparent to those who examine and consider the facts of recent past years. But, in times of trouble, ignorant men seize upon unlikely and impossible propositions and schemes for relief. There is no special medicine for this malady. Time, patience, the working of natural laws, the avoidance and cessation of the excitement and half madness of the past, and a general economy, will bring about a cure, not without some or much suffering, but without failure.

We adopted free trade in the year 1846. But our land-owners and farmers, and multitudes of our people, did not comprehend the principles we taught, and now a new generation is on the stage, ill-acquainted even with the facts of forty years ago. There has been no great distress since our Corn Law was abolished ; and now, when trouble has come for a time, some of the sufferers, and some of the quack doctors who are always ready to prescribe for the public, cry out for protection, as if we had never tried it before, and as if it had been found a specific in other countries.

There is no danger of our going back to protection. The present trouble will pass away. It has been aggravated by the evil policy of our Government, and that also will pass away ; and the simpletons who are looking for relief to an exploded doctrine and practice will relapse into that silence and obscurity which become them.

It is a grief to me that your people do not yet see their way to a more moderate tariff. They are doing wonders, unequaled in the world's history, in paying off your national debt. A more moderate tariff, I should think, would give you a better revenue, and by degrees you might approach a more civilized system. What can be more strange than for your great free country to build barriers against that commerce which is everywhere the handmaid of freedom and of civilization ?

I should despair of the prospects of mankind if I did not believe that before long the intelligence of your people would revolt against the barbarism of your tariff. It seems now your one great humiliation ; the world looks to you for example in all forms of freedom. As to commerce, the great civilizer, shall it look in vain ?

Believe me very sincerely yours,

JOHN BRIGHT.

A. THORNDIKE RICE, Esq., *New York*.

THE above letter, as will be seen, was written in reply to one from the editor of the "Review" asking Mr. Bright's opinion as to the nature and extent of the alleged movement in England looking to a re adoption of the protective system. Mr. Bright having kindly volunteered his permission, we take great pleasure in giving this interesting communication to the public.—EDITOR.